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SEPTEMBER 29-OCTOBER 12, 2016

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Prizes



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ON THE COVER

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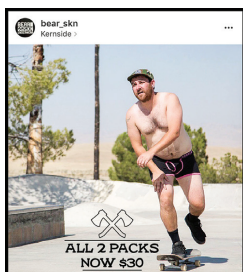
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FROM THE EDITOR | BY ANDY LIEN

The Beauty of Finding Yourself



(L-R): Harnaam Kaur: bearded dame, body confidence activist, @harnaamkaur; Bear Skn: comfortable underwear for brawny men (founded by former Minneapolisites Bjorn Ryan-Gorman and his partner Jody Koenig), @bear_skn; Beth Ditto: "fat, lesbian feminist" with her own clothing line, @marybethditto; The Invisible Tomboy: promoting and encouraging the gentlewoman/mxn tomboy, @theinvisibletomboy.

Have I mentioned before how what we see in media — on the screens, in the magazines, in images both moving and still — is representative of only about five percent of what our population actually looks like? That means that 95 percent of us don't often see ourselves in what's presented to our eyes. We're taller, shorter, bigger, slimmer, with longer torsos, with longer legs, with shorter necks, with bigger feet, with chubbier cheeks. We're diverse. And we're suffering from our own erasure.

This does not mean that the five percent we see is bad. It does mean that they're not representative of us. If we can find ourselves in them, great. If we can't, what do we do?

We need to look elsewhere. And I recommend Instagram. Instagram is an app that you can install on your smartphone or, if you don't have a smartphone, you can go to Instagram.com and join it via its website. What you have there is a collection of self-taken and self-published pho-

tos of people. Selfies. Fashion shoots. Promotional photos for items of clothing we don't often see in the five percent of the population's images that surround us. It's a grassroots way of finding ourselves as well as showing off who we are. Fighting our own erasure. I recommend joining it and then searching for people you want to surround yourself with; once I found people who look like me, my whole way of seeing changed. My Instagram feed became empowering.

Need suggestions for who to follow? Here are a handful of options... and then have fun exploring the wide world of Instagram. Take pictures of yourself to add to the array of beauty out there. Show off your personal style. Be present and expand the five percent to become more like 10 percent. To include you. Us.

With you and with power,
Andy ■

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Learning from Others

I recently spent 10 days in Amsterdam. Aside from the beauty of Amsterdam, itself, a city of which I am very fond, I was struck by a couple of cultural differences.

While Twin Citians are great cyclists, the Dutch carry it to a high art. Amsterdam, in particular, is heavily geared to bicycle traffic, both moms and dads toting offspring in ingenious ways. One dad steadied his six-year-old's bike with his right hand, while somehow steering his own and holding an infant in his left. Everyone sped along in a kaleidoscope of wardrobes from shorts, business suits, hijabs, and clerical garb, agile and helmet-less.

I'm studying Dutch, but I make no claims to speaking it beyond "Dank u"s and "Alstublieft"s, yet everyone (well, most everyone) was cordial and willing to help me out in English, from officials, as one would expect, to stock boys at the Jumbo supermarket to the young saleswoman in the Lambiek comic book shop.

Why have we here become so insular that it is unacceptable for a person to speak any language other than English? Why has it become grounds for assault and invective? Beyond the hundreds of indigenous

tongues originally spoken on this continent, one might recall that Dutch was one of the earliest languages spoken here in a town still several centuries from becoming the Big Apple. French was long the diplomatic language, back when that old rake Ben Franklin used his language skills to make Parisian society ladies swoon.

I found the twentysomething young man at the hotel desk spoke not only Dutch and a passable English, but Romanian, Italian, and a couple of other tongues. Not everyone speaks every second or third language fluently, but they can get by and interact with others from their own and foreign countries.

As the world becomes more heavily populated and tightly knit through the interaction of global citizens, it is a step backward to punish anyone here at home who chooses to speak a language other than English, or, to move into another problem area, who worship a religion other than evangelistic Christian, or who choose not to worship at all.

While Amsterdam works to embrace all its citizens, it's not a time for us to become more cripplingly restrictive of our own. ■

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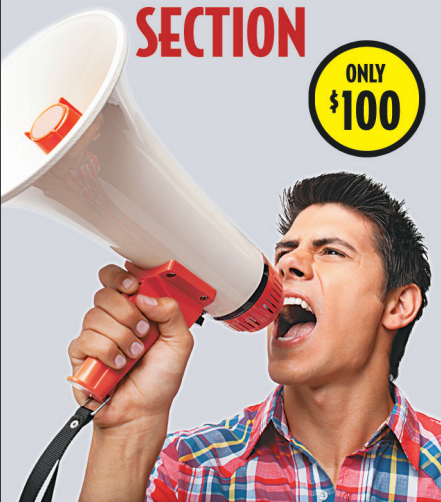
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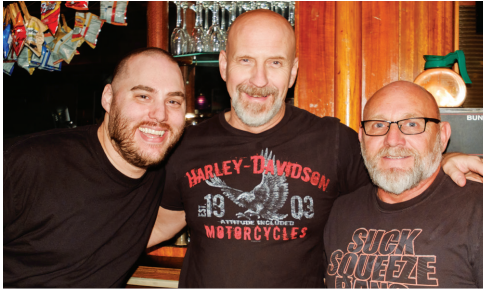
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Antigone. Photo by Craig Hostettler

BLUEBEARD'S DOLLHOUSE

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The boundary-breaking Combustible Company theater troupe (*Herocycle*) returns to one of the world's drama classics. That most emblematic of feminist plays written by a man, Norwegian Henrik's Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is the source of their latest adaptation. The iconic story of the disintegration of Nora and Torvald Helmer's marriage plays on site at St. Paul's James J. Hill House, a mansion which, like the play's Scandinavian setting, evokes the constricted opulence of Victorian Era wealth. A few years back Lex-Ham Community Arts staged Eugene O'Neill's *The First Man*, evoking a similar effect. Combustible goes one stretch farther by staging their show throughout the mansion, promenade-style.

Director and play adaptation writer Kym Longhi says, "Nora's fight to become human is not only a woman's struggle, but also a human struggle; the struggle to bring yourself fully into the world when social systems and labels keep telling you who you are. How can we have real intimacy with anyone if we hide behind a mask of femininity or masculinity created by others? By contextualizing the emotional abuse in Ibsen's play through the lens of Bluebeard's compulsive violence, I hope to reveal the violence of gender stereotyping in intimate relationships. The murders that occur in *Bluebeard's Dollhouse* are murders of the self, the deaths that are required of us when we conform to the dominant culture's social dictums. How do we break the oppression of the sanctioned walls of the dollhouse? Perhaps we must venture into the forbidden room and risk encountering the unthinkable in ourselves. In the room of secrets, we are confronted with a critical choice: accept and reconcile our secrets to our daylight

lives, or cut ourselves off from vital parts of our psyche. I see Nora's struggle to leave the dollhouse as a movement toward freedom within the self to bring about personal transformation and social change."

ANTIGONE

Through Oct. 16

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Theatre Coup d'Etat continues to be a significant destination where young artists show they have something relevant to say through the form of major classic drama (*Miss Julie*, *Hamlet*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Equus*). Director and play adaptation writer Meagan Kedrowski points out that the *Antigone* story immortalized in the Greek tragedy by Sophocles is a classic of good versus bad. However, she says, "Moving away from those clear black-and-white boundaries makes it more interesting to a modern audience. I wanted to dive deeper into the humanity of each character, especially Antigone, herself, as they struggle with asking the larger questions that the show presents: What is it to be a moral human being? What are you willing to die for? What does it mean to sell your soul to serve as a political leader versus holding on tight to, and fighting for, our personal beliefs? I chose this play because we find ourselves still in the position of facing the battle between having a broad sense of morality versus the entitlement of power. We are encouraging our audience to leave thinking about their own struggle with these questions."



Barbecue. Photo by Rich Ryan



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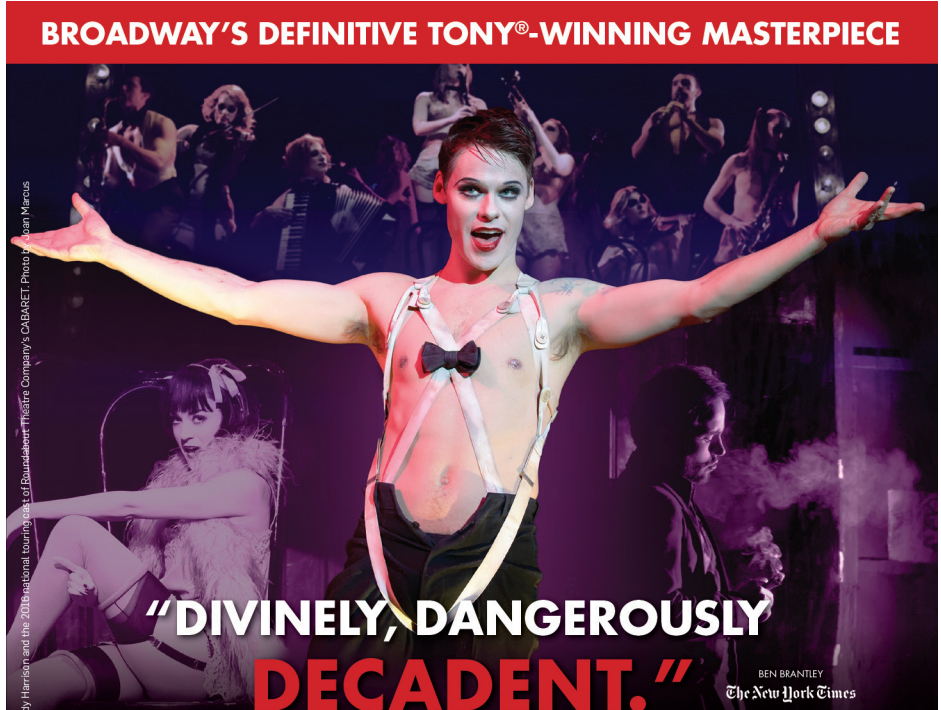
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BARBECUE

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www.mixedblood.com

John O'Hara's satirical comedy has been said to make us ponder if there is an African American equivalent of white so-called "trailer trash." Crack, prescription drugs, and whiskey swirl about a family barbecue that actually disguises an intervention for a sister whose addictions have spiraled out of control. The notion of misery as a favorite entertainment outlet for Americans (think Jerry Springer or Steve Wilkos) is called into question. And that's a very important question, to be sure! This area premiere features an interracial cast, which points to the reality that the U.S. is an interracial society.

Mixed Blood Theatre artistic director Jack Reuler says, "*Barbecue* is comically electric, incisive about racial politics, without the obvious pretense of social commentary. A sharp comedy that dares to take risks, with insightful language, characters, and situation. *Barbecue* manages to engage and entertain while maintaining its razor-edge observations about racial dynamics in the age of celebrity."

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Through Oct. 29

Guthrie Theater, 818 S 2nd St., Minneapolis

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www.guthrietheater.org

Sense. Sensibility. Just what do these two words mean and, perhaps more important, what does Jane Austen have to say about them? The Guthrie is staging Kate Hamill's new adaptation of Austen's classic novel wherein the two Dashwood sisters separately embody these two qualities. When their father dies and they are left relatively impoverished in 1790s England, these qualities, or perhaps better said, these characteristics dictate the choices they make in how they navigate life and the world they live in.

At the Guthrie you'll see Elinor (Jolly Abraham) following the rules and restraining her thoughts, opinions, and emotions while sister Marianne (Alejandra Escalante) expresses in a way that nowadays some label as "unfiltered." Though the original novel was published in 1811, the balancing of these two qualities remains necessary in order to keep a balance in how we respond to others. This election year we have seen voters and candidates on both and various sides of issues get swept up into passion that was felt to be right at the time as "telling it like it is" but then having to awkwardly walk back what they originally stated. And I'm not just talking about one single candidate and their voters, either.

Sense makes us react with forcefulness, which can definitely be the right thing in some circumstances. But sensibility helps us to grasp the bigger picture and, when necessary, weigh the options so that we might respond in a measured and constructive way as opposed to a reckless way. Guest directed at the Guthrie by the new Jungle Theater artistic director Sarah Rasmussen.

MUSIC ANIMATED

Oct. 20-22

In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre

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www.hobt.org*Sense and Sensibility.* Photo by Dan Norman

Bart Buch is nothing less than a puppetmaster genius. At In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre he has beguiled with queer-themed puppet performances like *Kid Enkidu* and *Ode to Walt Whitman* which also celebrated Federico Garcia Lorca at Intermedia Arts.

He is now turning his talents toward work that is still universal but which reflects the concerns of the Phillips and the GLBT-oriented Powderhorn neighborhoods. The new *Music Animated* project blends puppetry, video projections, and music in a way that promises to be well worth seeing.

Buch shares that he is "exploring the in-between land of music and puppetry, where these two forms dance together to evoke spirit and poetry. As a queer artist, I'm drawn to and comfortable with the in-between lands where things are neither and both to find other unique, beautiful queer places. Many queer people are gifted at finding and teasing out that unique beauty, poetry, and spirituality of situations and the world needs these gifts now. With the inaugural *Music Animated* concert I wanted to work with Martin Dosh, a longtime collaborator, because we have developed a language with music and puppets that creates an immersive experience and evokes simple, yet lush, moods, full of heart. *Music Animated* will blend Dosh songs with visual imagery reflecting stories of positive, passionate work in the Phillips and Powderhorn neighborhoods. Working with neighborhood youth apprentices, I collected 28 "neighborhood helper" interviews this summer and these interviews will serve as the inspiration for the concert." ■

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Nikki Vixxen Captures Miss Toast of the Town House 2016 Title

On the evening of July 30, the 2016 Toast of the Town House Pageant, the 19th annual such event, took place. Three contestants competed for the title. Categories were theme wear, talent, and evening gown/question and answer. The host was Jol D. Principle. Anastasia C. Principle, stepping-down Miss Toast of the Town House 2015, performed several numbers, as did other past titleholders including Barbara Gordon (2004), Dra Matica (2007), Kaydance (2008), and Jamie Monroe (2009). Nikki Vixxen captured the coveted crown. Sasha Carter Pierce Richards was first runner-up. Alexis Beemer was second runner-up and also Miss Congeniality. Anastasia C. Principle bestowed a special award on ultra-popular Town House bartender Mickey Short. The Town House, St. Paul's only GLBT bar, marks its 47th anniversary as a community establishment this fall. ■



Miss Toast of the Town House 2016, Nikki Vixxen. Photo by George Holdgrafer

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Grant Whittaker

'Be Your Own Muse'

By Shane Lueck

With a background in fashion and dance, Grant Whittaker understands the human body. How the body moves, how fabric drapes the body, and how to adapt fashion for each body.

"Having come from that dance and theater background, it's always about what's going to look good, what's going to be comfortable, what's going to be wearable, kind of the overall function of the piece," he says. "Sometimes that leads to a little bit more avant-garde, but generally it's more about the aesthetic of the individual, looking at everybody as a muse."

That knowledge and outlook is greatly influenced by Whittaker's German upbringing and traveling around the world. He jokes of a tagline he uses along the lines of setting the table with European flair ("and a lot of fruit," he laughs with a wink). Growing up, traveling, and spending so much time in Europe, Whittaker has developed a certain aesthetic. As he says, shopping across the pond is really an event.

"You see people who really do dress to go out and go shopping," he says. "I think casual for a European woman is a cashmere wrap with a T-shirt and a great pair of jeans and heels. When you see that, I would say, at 40, you look at certain things and go 'OK, I'm still in the middle.' I get the millennial, but I also get the luxury and grandeur of what fashion is, or used to be. We don't have as much of that anymore."

Equipped with an eclectic upbringing and approach to fashion, for Whittaker, it's always about wanting to support the local fashion industry. For a man who confesses he marches to the beat of his own drum (even if that drum beats "a little bit more theatrical, sometimes a little cleaner, sometimes a little more haute couture, and sometimes very practical"), Whittaker feels like

he's hit his stride 15 years after arriving on the Twin Cities scene.

"I'm passionate about fashion, and I'm also really passionate about my mission statement." Part of that is to bring style and trend entertainment and awareness to nonprofits to help raise money. He adds, "And I do that,

I really do that. And then the other thing is to just make fashion more accessible to people, for people to understand it and see their own personality as being their own personal muses."

Whittaker has had makeover columns as well as personal and corporate clients, and the running theme is always to find the muse within. "It's a good time to reinforce that in our gay culture, to make people feel better about themselves," he says. "When I work with personal clients, I only want them to see me one time. Most people don't do that; I do it for the reward of the individual, not for the financial reward. I take the approach of, do you really need to work with me? If you're going to work with me, be real with me about what you're really struggling with, what is it that we need to do for you."

The fashion guru doesn't care what the budget is, he will work within whatever number he's given.



Grant Whittaker.
Photo by Kyle Lieberman Photography

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"Some of the people I work with have a lot of money and some of the people have no money," he shares. "To me it doesn't really matter either way because it's about the reward and the education of the individual. Sometimes I'm out with people and we're shopping for exactly what they're needing, sometimes I'm out working with people to clean up their closet and teach them where they can go to fill it in. On your budget, not on an expected budget, but on what you can actually afford."

"The main reason you would want to work with me is that you really start your appearance mission statement with feel-good factor," he continues. "I make my clients get real with me. Tell me, do you hate your arms? That's fine; we'll work around that. It really is that personal mission statement of making people feel good about themselves. I think anyone who is in touch with their own self-esteem issues can only be better at what they do, because you're coming from a place of reality."

The notions of accessibility and feel-good factor extend to people within the industry as well. Whittaker recalls how some people have an idea of fashion being "uppity," and he understands where people are coming from. "At 40, having been here for 15 years, it's really interesting seeing some people's perspectives," he says. "Sure, the people who were rude to me were the people in their 40s or 50s or 60s who had already accomplished something and didn't have time to pick up the phone because they thought you're young, you have time. When I first moved here, people weren't as open."

He remembers when he first moved to the Twin Cities at 24, complete with style books, editorial pages, videos, and extensive proof of gorgeous work he'd done. "I had proof of all this work that I had done and still people wouldn't want to open the door," he recalls. "We have youth who are going to be coming out of design school and are just starting. I make every attempt to be supportive; there is no one in town who wouldn't say that they reached out to me and I haven't either picked up the phone, written an email back, or had coffee with them. Because people didn't always do that for me."

It's about being the mentor instead of the deject-er, he says. "It takes two minutes to be nice to somebody, it takes five to be a total bitch," he laughs, before adding, "By the time you work yourself up just to have a bad attitude, you might as well just be nice."

"As you get older and as a creative person, all of us should inspire each other," he continues. "That 21-year-old might inspire something I do at Fashionopolis or inspire something I do down the road, or I may have inspired something with her. At a certain point that's what you would hope, you hope that people would be more open. You don't always have enough time, but you can stop and say 'nice to meet you'

"The main reason you would want to work with me is that you really start your appearance mission statement with feel-good factor," he continues. "I make my clients get real with me.

Tell me, do you hate your arms? That's fine; we'll work around that. It really is that personal mission statement of making people feel good about themselves.



Grant Whittaker. Photo by Kyle Lieberman Photography

or 'how are you' or whatever."

An open and supporting environment for creatives is exactly why Whittaker thinks the local fashion community is excelling. "There are people like myself and Jahna Péloquin at *Minnesota Monthly* who was a stylist and is now supportive of other people who are pushing. There are people like Allison Kaplan of *Mpls.St.Paul Magazine* who

is supportive of people like myself."

He hopes to extend that support even more to the GLBT community. As someone who wears his pride every day, Whittaker says it's not about celebrating for one weekend every year; it's every day. "I think that is information that needs to be known by everyone," he says with a suddenly serious tone. "It's not just celebrating it once in awhile, it's showing people you are who you are. I'm gay, I knew it when I was young, I knew that's who I was supposed to be. The other part is just letting people know that we were all created differently. As long as you take pride in that, that's the first step in terms of what you do for the community."

Beyond that, he would love to be more involved in the local GLBT community. "I'm the gay man in a little bit of a straight world sometimes," he says. "People call me for a lot of things and I come in and do good work. I would love to work more with our GLBT charities or anything I could do. I go into the nonprofit sector and I make people money. I would love to be more involved and be able to help my brothers and sisters out even more, because I can. Especially with gay youth, because we need to get positive messages out there." ■

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Health & Wellness Update: Local HIV/AIDS Service Organizations

By Shane Lueck

HIV/AIDS service organizations provide assistance in many forms to people living with HIV/AIDS and their families and friends. These services may include counseling as well as HIV testing and referral resources. The organizations listed below offer additional information and resources on their web sites about HIV/AIDS, the services they provide, upcoming events, and much more.

Organization: African American AIDS Task Force (AAATF)

Serves: AAATF serves all people living with HIV/AIDS (primarily African Americans) who are below the federal poverty guideline, reside in the Twin Cities Greater Metropolitan Area, and are HIV positive, at high risk or affected by HIV/AIDS.

Location: 2400 Park Ave. S, Minneapolis

Web Address: www.aaatf.org

AAATF was established on World AIDS Day 1994 by African American people living with HIV/AIDS who desired to create a culturally appropriate response to address issues specifically related to African American people living in Minnesota. Current services provided by the AAATF include: medical case management, culturally appropriate support groups, medical transportation services, early intervention services, HIV testing, the Community Promise Program (African American gay and bi men), peer outreach and education, and mentoring and training. AAATF further extends its reach into the community by building strong relationships and partnering with community peers, resource providers, and other HIV care and service organizations.

Latest News: AAATF has recently been funded through Minnesota Department of Health Eliminating Health Disparities Initiative to conduct a “new” program, Community PROMISE. The Community PROMISE (Peers Reaching Out and Modeling Intervention Strategies) evidence-based HIV/STI prevention intervention relies on role model stories and peers from the target population.

Upcoming Events: AAATF will be participating in the Minnesota Fighting AIDS on Bikes upcoming Pedal Camp fundraiser which supports eight beneficiaries, all of which are Minnesota-based AIDS service organizations.

Organization: The Aliveness Project

Serves: People living with HIV/AIDS throughout Minnesota

Location: 3808 Nicollet Ave., Minneapolis

Web Address: www.aliveness.org

The Aliveness Project is a thriving nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting stability of health and wellness for people living with HIV/AIDS in Minnesota. Founded 30 years ago, Aliveness provides important supportive services such as food shelf, hot meals, case management, integrative therapies like massage and acupuncture, and HIV prevention/outreach programming. In addition, Aliveness provides much needed physical space for people impacted by HIV to participate in educational programming, build skills and, above all, create community.

Latest News: Use of the center continues to increase, particularly in the Nutrition Program (food shelf and meals). In August alone, Aliveness helped over 650 people living with HIV/AIDS with one of their programs. Over the summer Aliveness added staff, integrative therapy rooms, a conference room, and a community room to accommodate and grow in-house activities and services. On the program front, Aliveness is developing the state's first non-medical case management program and is leading an initiative to provide early intervention efforts and HIV testing and care linkage within several African-born communities. Staff continue to do HIV testing, outreach, case management and care linkage with some of the hardest to reach including PLWHA facing chronic mental health, chemical health and housing barriers.

Upcoming Events: Taste For Life Fundraiser Gala, Oct. 18 and the holiday gift program, providing a holiday gift for a person or family impacted by HIV/AIDS.

Organization: Clare Housing

Serves: People living with HIV/AIDS who are unable to access affordable housing and/or supportive healthcare for a number of reasons.

Location: Apartments and administration offices are located at 929 Central Ave. NE, Minneapolis, with additional apartments located throughout the metro.

Web Address: www.clarehousing.org

Clare Housing's vision is global, envisioning an AIDS-free world built on a foundation of equitable access to housing and health care. Its mission is local, providing a continuum of affordable and supportive housing options that create healing communities and optimize the health of people living with HIV/AIDS. The Clare Housing team works closely with residents who may be having challenges maintaining stable housing and care. Its person-centered planning allows staff and residents to tailor services for each individual that define what “living well” means to them. Today, Clare Housing's services include personal care support and homemaking, life skills support, linkages with services and resources, 24/7 nursing care and medical adherence support, and more.

Latest News: On Sept. 20, well over 400 guests attended the *A Place to Call Home* Fundraising Breakfast at the Aria Event Center. Also, Clare Housing will break ground on Marshall Flats (36 units) in Northeast Minneapolis this fall, scheduled to open in 2017.

Upcoming Events: Journey Home Program, Oct. 5, demonstrates how affordable housing and supportive services improve the quality of life for people living with HIV in the Twin Cities.



Organization: Hope House of St. Croix Valley

Serves: Since 1991, Hope House serves people living with HIV who can no longer live independently, with a mission to provide a nonjudgmental home with compassionate care that respects the dignity of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Location: Stillwater, Minnesota

Web Address: www.hopehousescv.org

Upcoming Events: Each year, Hope House holds an annual fundraiser in August, this year the event name was changed to The Scott Zahren Memorial Cruise on the St. Croix to honor Hope House's long-time executive director who passed away suddenly in April 2015.

Organization: Minnesota AIDS Project (MAP)

Serves: MAP serves everyone in Minnesota affected by HIV from those living with HIV to those at high-risk for HIV infection to the general public with questions about HIV.

Location: 2577 Territorial Rd., St. Paul

Web Address: www.mnaidsproject.org

MAP's mission is to lead Minnesota's fight to stop HIV through prevention, advocacy, awareness, and services. MAP provides services in the areas of legal, transportation, chemical health, prevention, emergency financial assistance, public policy, education, insurance benefits, HIV testing, support groups, MAP AIDSLine, case management, and housing.

Latest News: MAP is excited to announce new PrEP navigation services assisting people at risk for HIV infection with accessing this new and effective HIV prevention strategy.

Upcoming Events: MAP is thrilled to be part of Revlon's Love Is On Million Dollar Challenge beginning on Sept. 14.

Organization: Open Arms of Minnesota

Serves: Every year, Open Arms provides nutritious, homemade meals to those living with HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening illnesses in the Twin Cities. Open Arms not only serves their clients, but also provide meals to their children and caregivers in order to help entire families and households cope with the effects of a serious illness.

Location: 2500 Bloomington Ave., Minneapolis, with a delivery area within the 494-694 loop.

Web Address: www.openarmsmn.org

Open Arms grows, prepares, and delivers nutritious meals to people living in the metro area with HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening illnesses, delivering over 500,000 meals per year with the generous help of over 5000 volunteers. Open Arms also grows produce to use in their meals at three urban gardens located in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Latest News: Founded in 1986, Open Arms is celebrating their 30th anniversary this year. Everyone is invited to join the organization, which is always looking for more volunteers to help chop in the kitchen, harvest in the gardens, or deliver meals to clients.

Upcoming Events: Once a month, Open Arms turns into a pop-up restaurant and the trained chefs go crazy! The next pop-up dinner is Oct. 27. Also, on World Aids Day (Dec. 1), they will be celebrating 30 years with a screening of their historical video and a fun event.

Organization: Park House

Serves: People living with HIV/AIDS.

Location: 710 E 24th St. #303, Minneapolis

Web Address: www.allinahealth.com

Park House is a structured day health and mental health facility. At Park House, clients work with staff members in an environment that nurtures and supports each individual. Through medication management, art, music and recreation therapy, counseling, coaching, conversation, and structured activities, Park House fosters a sense of pride, creativity, and independence in each person. Park House provides nursing care, psychosocial therapies, nutrition (breakfast and lunch), and collaborative treatments with physicians, mental health professional, and case managers. Park House exists to enhance the quality of life, maximize human dignity, and promote the health, wellness, and independence of persons with HIV/AIDS.

Upcoming Events: On Oct. 15, Park House and the Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus proudly present Bingo-A-Go-Go "Fairy Tale Bingo" at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. Also, on World AIDS Day (Dec. 1), Park House will celebrate their 20-year anniversary.

Organization: Minnesota Fighting AIDS on Bikes (Red Ribbon Ride)

Serves: Money raised by the Red Ribbon Ride goes to numerous HIV/AIDS service organizations throughout Minnesota.

Location: 4447 3rd Ave. S, Minneapolis

Web Address: www.redribbonride.org

A four-day, 300-mile bicycle event to raise vital funds for eight HIV/AIDS service organizations providing services, treatment, and care for those living with and impacted by HIV.

Latest News: This was a record-breaking fundraising year with a 44 percent increase in funds raised and a 25 percent increase in participants of the event. For the third time in the history of the event, the Ride raised over \$500,000, which has not happened since 2007. The total amount brought in by the event is not finalized but will likely be over \$630,000.

Upcoming Events: Pedal Camp is a weekend camping event and bicycle ride at Camp One Heartland in Willow River, Minnesota from Sept. 23–25, with a 30- or 60-mile bicycle ride on the beautiful Willard Munger Trail and options to volunteer as crew.

Organization: Rural AIDS Action Network (RAAN)

Serves: People living with HIV/AIDS in greater Minnesota.

Location: Five locations in St. Cloud, Mankato, Duluth, Grand Rapids, and Moorhead

Web Address: www.raaan.org

RAAN provides a range of services in greater Minnesota. Prevention services include outreach, education, and testing for HIV and HCV. For those living with HIV/AIDS, RAAN provides counseling, medical case management, and other supportive services. The Duluth location hosts a syringe exchange that provides clean syringes and supplies to people who inject drugs and Naloxone.

Latest News: RAAN just received a grant from the Department of Human Services Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division that will allow them to distribute Naloxone throughout the state.

Upcoming Events: Stay tuned! ■



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Major Titleholders and Community Awards

Syn Palmer captures Women's International Leather Legacy 2016 title. Photo by Janet Ryan



Left to right: boy Jake, Sir Ivan and boy Patrick, 2016 International Leatherboy, LeatherSIR and Community Bootblack. Photo by Ryan Brown



boy Woody, first runner-up for International Leatherboy 2016. Photo by Randy Spearhead



Andrew Bertke, 2016 Pantheon of Leather Midwest Regional Award winner. Photo by Steve Lenius



Karri Plowman and Tynan Fox, TCL&L owners, winners of Pantheon of Leather Award for Business of the Year 2016. Photo by Steve Lenius

Minnesota's leather community recently has had much to be proud of. Within the space of a month, members of the community were awarded two major leather titles and received two major leather community service awards.

Syn Palmer was named Women's International Leather Legacy (WILL) 2016 as part of the WILL weekend held Aug. 5-7 in Dallas. Palmer is a member of the Twin City girls of Leather and was named first runner-up to Ms. Minnesota Leather Pride 2016 on April 2 at The Saloon.

This was the sixth year for the Women's International Leather Legacy title and weekend. The focus of the WILL title is on capturing and preserving women's leather history. As WILL 2016, Palmer will spend her title year interviewing leatherwomen and then preparing the interviews for inclusion in the Women's Leather History Project at the Leather Archives & Museum in Chicago.

On Sept. 3, one month after Palmer was named WILL 2016—and again, at a contest held in Dallas—Sir Ivan was named International LeatherSIR 2016 at the International Leather SIR, Leatherboy and International Community Bootblack (ILSb-ICBB) weekend. At the same time, boy Woody was named first runner-up to International Leatherboy 2016. The new International Leatherboy 2016 is boy Jake and the new Interna-

tional Community Bootblack 2016 is boy Patrick.

The International LeatherSIR and Leatherboy titles, which started in 2002, are descended from the International Mr. Drummer and Drummerboy titles. International Mr. Drummer, started by Drummer Magazine in 1979, was one of the two oldest major international leather titles (the other being International Mr. Leather, also started in 1979).

Sir Ivan and boy Woody both won their original leather titles, Minnesota LeatherSIR and Minnesota Leatherboy, on April 4, 2015 at The Saloon. Both went on to compete at Great Lakes Leather Alliance (GLLA) weekend in Indianapolis where, on Oct. 3, 2015, Sir Ivan was named Great Lakes LeatherSIR 2016 and boy Woody was named Great Lakes Leatherboy 2016.

Andrew Bertke wins 2016 Pantheon of Leather Midwest Regional Award; Twin Cities Leather & Latte wins 2016 Pantheon of Leather Business of the Year Award

This year's Pantheon of Leather Community Service Awards presentation ceremony was held Thursday evening, Sept. 1, in Dallas in conjunction with the International Leather SIR, Leatherboy and Community Bootblack weekend. The Pantheon of Leather Community Service Awards were started in 1991. Awards were presented in 26 categories, and two of this

year's winners are from the Twin Cities.

Andrew Bertke, winner of Pantheon's 2016 Midwest Regional Award, joined the Minnesota leather community in the mid-1990s and has served as a leader, artist, and photographer. Bertke joined the Atons of Minneapolis in 2002 and has served as the club's president, vice-president, editor, pledge master, and webmaster. An award-winning photographer, Bertke has documented many leather events and contests. He also has created portraits of local and international leather titleholders and other community members. Since 2007, Bertke has been a contributing artist to Minnesota Leather Pride, creating unique dog tags and t-shirts.

Twin Cities Leather & Latte (TCL&L), winner of Pantheon's 2016 Business of the Year Award, is proud to be the world's only combination of full-service leather and kink retail shop and coffee shop. More than just a retail store, TCL&L has become a community hub. The shop offers leather clothing with onsite leather tailoring and a wide selection of BDSM/kink-related gear and toys. The full-service cafe offers indoor and outdoor seating and community meeting space for clubs and organizations. The enterprise was founded with a motto of "Community First!" and the store's owners, Karri Plowman and Tynan Fox, take that motto seriously. ■

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2017 Ford Escape



Change is always good.

In any automobile, change can help improve the vehicle's look and/or driving experience. It could be a subtle change to the front bumper or a new set of gauges. It could also be as important as a brand new engine or transmission. Either way, we like to see evolution in the vehicles we drive every day.

When we reviewed the Ford Escape back in 2012, the car went through an extensive overhaul from its Kinetic look right down to the platform and its EcoBoost engines. It took the old boxy Escape we knew and loved to something that was completely different: a design that challenged the eye with no V6 or Hybrid powertrains available.

With this huge change, the transformed Escape became Ford's second best-selling product in North America, behind the F-Series pickups. Families flocked to the Escape, selling between 20 and 28,000 units per month. In July Escape sales reached its highest since the introduction of the new body style.

The Escape is just for American consumption. This product is sold in almost every market Ford has a presence. Outside of our continent, our Escape is called the Kuga. Just like here, the Kuga is also playing in a heavily contested segment full of compact SUVs on every continent. For the most part, the Escape and Kuga are sell-

ing quite well where the segment is the hottest, namely Europe, Australia, and China.

In considering the concept of change, how does one transform and evolve a successful vehicle? Ford might have achieved this quite well in its 2017 Escape.

The first change we saw was in the front clip. This is the global face of the Ford SUV, which began with the larger Edge mid-sized two-row model. It also matches the face of a model that should actually be sold here: the Everest/Endeavor. This vehicle is based on the global ranger platform and has been a success throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Maybe we will get that by 2020.

Back to the Escape, the new front clip includes new integrated LED driving lamps and improved headlamp bulbs for better vision at night. In all, the look is clean and handsome. Ford also worked on the rear end, by scaling down the rear taillights to almost match the ones on the Focus hatchback. Again, the rear end is cleaner than before. The rest of the Escape's exterior is the same as before, but with better bookends making it a nicer vehicle to look at.

Our tester is the top-of-the-line Titanium, just like our 2013 tester. It came with handsome chrome finished 18-inch alloy wheels wearing Michelin Latitude Tour tires. It is worth men-

tioning that it wore a gorgeous shade of Lightning Blue metallic. In all, this Escape has been transformed into something that is welcoming to more customers than before.

They would also be welcomed by an interior that has not changed as much on the surface, but remains quite functional and tactile. The steering wheel is new, now shared with the Focus and the 2017 Fusion. In fact, this steering wheel has better switches than its predecessor for the information screen, audio, and cruise control. There are other subtle changes in switches and readouts compared to all previous Kinetic-designed Escapes.

The biggest change came a model year before with the introduction of SYNC3. In the past, Microsoft provided the driver for all previous versions of Ford's infotainment system. The result was a mixed bag of connectivity and disconnection. On paper, SYNC was a great idea. The complaints piled up and Ford responded with a new version. For SYNC3, Ford brought in BlackBerry to provide the architecture for a system that is friendlier toward mobile devices. The result is quicker device pairing, better options on screen for apps and navigation use, and a better three-pod touchscreen interface.

There is more to SYNC3. Ford added connectivity to Apple CarPlay and Android Auto for

2017. If you use Apple or Google Maps, this will work well with you. You can also switch back to Ford's superb navigation system and tuning in its HD radio and SiriusXM channels. Sony provides the output of this system with 10 speakers positioned well throughout the cabin.

Titanium models are upholstered in standard leather. Seating is OK, providing some support and bolstering up front. It does take some time to find the right seating position with the power adjustments available. Rear seat space offers excellent head room for tall passengers, even with reclining seatbacks. Legroom is sufficient for average-sized passengers; however. Cargo space is ample, with 34 cubic feet available with the rear seats up. Once both rear seats fold down, the Escape can carry up to 68 cubic feet of precious cargo.

For 2017, Ford offers the Escape a choice of three engines: a 2.5-liter four-cylinder, the EcoBoost 1.5-liter turbocharged four-cylinder, and the larger 2.0-liter EcoBoost engine. We drove the latter in 2012 and found it to deliver great performance with lower fuel economy. Our tester has the newer 1.5-liter EcoBoost engine with 179 horsepower and 177 pound-feet of torque. While this engine matches up well with the Escape's competitors, it is really one of the best engines

in its class with the lack of turbo lag and great throttle response. It is a balanced engine that is truly the Escape's sweet spot in performance.

Power is delivered to the front wheels only through its solid shifting six-speed automatic transmission in this tester. Four-wheel drive is available, of course. It is the best choice to make in our part of the world. In terms of fuel economy, it averaged 24.2 MPG.

The Escape does ride high, but quite smoothly. It does its best it absorb bumps and cracks on the road. Cornering yields a bit of roll and lean, but not enough to cause alarm. That is, unless you hit its limits and beyond. Steering is OK, with a soft on-center feel and solid turning radius. Steering wheel action is a bit on the numb side, but it can respond well when necessary. Brakes are very good with solid stops in normal and panic situations.

Our tester came with a host of active safety features, which truly work in the Escape. Adaptive Cruise Control is complemented by a Forward Collision system. Lane Departure mitigation also works well with steering assist; however, I found that the passenger-side Blind Spot Monitoring warning could not be seen well in certain daylight situations. This Escape did come with Enhanced Park Assist, which

helps in parallel and perpendicular parking for those of us who do not trust our own parking skills. To round everything up, this tester had a backup camera with reverse sensing and additional parking and motion sensors that checks the vehicle all around for obstructions.

A basic 2017 Ford Escape S with front wheel drive is available with a base price of \$23,600. Our front-drive Titanium tester arrived with a sticker price of \$34,875. Adding four-wheel drive will add another \$1,750 to the bill, while the more powerful 2.0-liter EcoBoost engine is another \$1,295 on top of that.

Just like at the end of 2012, the Ford Escape remains a solid choice for consumers looking for something different among compact SUVs. The 2017 version gives this strong selling vehicle looks that are easier on the eyes and better technology that is useful in every occasion. But, is it the best in the class? According to Cars.com, their recent comparison of the top contenders in the class put it first above the rest. According to us, it is a stronger contender than before in a highly competitive segment.

Making changes to a vehicle can help its cause. This is truly the case of the 2017 Ford Escape. Therefore, change is always good, indeed. ■

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Gratitude II

Five years ago, I penned a column entitled “Gratitude” that detailed how a group of well-off, totally straight cisgender people had selected me to be the executive director of a brand new nonprofit, Call for Justice (C4J). To this very day, I can’t believe they had the guts to hire me (a newbie to the Twin Cities and a transwoman who doesn’t pass 100 percent) to launch a nonprofit from scratch.

It’s been quite a ride too; in those five years, we (I didn’t do it alone) built an organization that garnered an American Bar Association award for innovative ways of helping low-income people connect with lawyers; we envisioned and facilitated creation of a low-fee law firm in St. Paul; and we’ve traveled thousands of miles in greater Minnesota to train social service agencies on how to connect their clients with pro bono lawyers.

(By the way, I never share about being transgender when I do my C4J work; I simply show up as Ellie Krug, human. Consequently, in Bemidji there’s a half dozen very nice but completely clueless social workers who’ve not stumbled on to the fact that I’m trans. Instead, because of my deep voice, I can imagine their pity over erroneously believing that I smoked five packs of cigarettes a day for 25 years. “Oh, that poor Ellie Krug!”)

Yes, my little nonprofit has accomplished much. I’m appreciative of the support that so many have given to make that happen (and for most of those “many,” I’m the first trans person they’ve ever met).

However, it’s now time for me to go on to other things and goals that I want to accomplish before this body of mine wears out. Hence, sometime in the next several months, I will leave C4J to take a different path, one that involves being even more of an innovator, human catalyst, and doer.

Or so I hope.

Thus, it was with a big smile that I sat in my corporate attorney’s office earlier this month and watched as he hit “send” on a link to the Minnesota Secretary of State’s website. With that, he created Human Inspiration Works, my newest venture aimed at doing my part to make the world a better place.

Yup, at nearly 60, I’m starting over yet again, charting a new course that’s got no guarantee of success and a great deal of personal and financial risk.

And I’ve got buckets of gratitude over the chance to do it. I know I’m darn lucky, too; most trans people struggle to get just one do-over after transitioning genders. Here I am going for number two.

With that, I think, comes a special obligation to make sure I succeed. What is Human Inspiration Works about?

In sum, it’s my way of putting a label on all that I’m presently doing and more that I seek to accomplish. It formalizes the speaking and diversity training that I’ve been undertaking since I transitioned genders in 2009 (at this point, 300+ speaking/training events). Incorporating also provides a professional base for the “inclusionist” consulting that I’ve been conducting on-site at businesses and organizations. Finally, it provides some framework for my dreams and imagination, such as my goal to see Minnesota lead the nation in educating “ordinary” people about the value of diversity and inclusion. We’ll see how it all goes; here’s to wishing me luck.

That leaves two remaining items of business.

First, my new endeavor needs a logo. What better way to make the point about the value of inclusion than to include the community in helping to brand it? For those graphic artists and anyone else out there who think they could design a logo that captures the spirit and purpose of Human Inspiration Works, go to www.humaninspirationworks.com for information about how to enter a logo design contest.

The second item relates to filling my position at Call for Justice. If you’re a lawyer or if you have a nonprofit management background and are passionate about helping low-income people connect with lawyers to protect core needs like housing or freedom from abusers, go to the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits website (www.minnesotanonprofits.org) and check out the C4J executive director job posting. It’s a rewarding position and the right candidate will get the chance to work with a great board of directors. Most of all, it’s a very cool way to do some community good.

There you have it. Life continues to unfold for me in ways that I could never have imagined when I endured living as a man. What a ride; thank god I got here.

Even more, thank you to everyone who’s made this possible. I am so very grateful! ■

Ellen (Ellie) Krug is the author of Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change (2013). She frequently speaks and trains on diversity and inclusion topics; visit www.humaninspirationworks.com where you can sign up for her newsletter. She welcomes your comments at ellenkrugwriter@gmail.com.

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When Babies Attack

My office is currently under attack! A monster is roaming the halls, drooling on things, demanding attention, and thinking of no one's needs but its own.

The monster is being carried around by an alien life form. This alien closely resembles a woman who was once my colleague. This woman disappeared a couple months ago. Now, here she is, smelling vaguely of sour milk and communicating in a foreign tongue to the monster in her arms.

The monster grunts, screams, and gestures wildly. The alien, who is obviously the monster's slave, attempts to placate the monster, quickly fetching whatever the monster demands: a computer mouse, an office keycard, a breast.

Mostly, though, what the monster wants is an audience.

So, as soon as it appears in my department, we are all required to abandon our work and gather around its plump, unbaked cookie-like form. We spend at least a half hour fawning and marveling at its ability to perform rudimentary tasks that you mastered many, many years ago.

The monster stares at its supplicants in an oddly unfocused fashion, until it firmly locks into a target. Once the monster's bouncing, dilated pupils settle into a deathly stare and laser into you, there will be a 10-second period in which you are expected to audition for its favor. You must humiliate yourself in your own workplace to please the monster. You contort your face, make noises that resemble bodily functions, and try to speak the monster's language. The monster will seriously consider your efforts and will then issue its judgment.

The best you can hope for is a smile. If this happens, you can breathe a sigh of relief and retreat back to your office in triumph. If, however, the monster breaks out in hysterical tears and buries its face into its slave's bosom, you will be dealt with a career-withering blow.

"The monster does not like her," your co-workers will say, shaking their heads at your once promising future at the organization. You will then be forced to remain in the monster's audience, witnessing others succeed where you failed.

When the monster has finally finished its path of destruction, you will quietly log onto your computer and begin a job hunt, and the monster will go home for a nap.

At the risk of nominating myself for the position of Worst Person in the World, I'm going to make a bold statement: I don't like babies in the workplace!

It's not that I don't like babies. While I admit that I prefer toddlers, children, and even teenagers to infants, I've got no real beef with babies. They are just fine, as long as their interests don't conflict with mine.

I have no issue with them when they are at home, ruling from their highchair/thrones, babbling nonsensically and draining their parents' collective life force. This is their kingdom! And I respect their authority.

But, I've got a problem with them in the office. I'm the only one allowed to throw temper tantrums here, and I don't like to be upstaged by an adorable ingénue.

I find the pressure to compliment a coworker's baby particularly vexing. You can't just pet it and say, "Nice baby." You have to offer a credible assessment of its extraordinariness. But, honestly, what have these creatures achieved other than an impressively harrowing journey through their mother's birth canal?

So, when I start hearing the terrifying warning sounds of ooh-ing and aah-ing from nearby offices, I close my office door and hunker beneath my desk/bunker. I curl up in a fetal position and nervously nibble on my thumb, waiting for the terrible beast to pass. ■



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Personal Style

I recently dyed my hair blue, pierced my ears, and thrifted for a bunch of new clothes. For some, this is considered a standard Friday, but for me it was an emotional occasion. My hair has never been dyed, I've never been pierced before, and to be quite honest, I'm not really that into shopping. This recent transformation has startled my family and friends, who believe I'm going through some sort of personal crisis. Maybe they're not totally wrong.

I'm finally starting to feel that my outside is a reflection of my inside, and while I've never shied away from loud styles, my obsessions with pastels and punk rock is finally coming to the surface. Personal style is a constant evolution, and, while societal norms will play their part, I like to think that my own personal style is an abundant reflection of who I am as a person. (Also a constant evolution.) I get a lot of questions about my ideologies when it comes to the way I dress. At the expense of sounding self-indulgent, here are some monikers of my personal style and what they mean to me:

TALL/OVERSIZED SHIRTS

I like a long shirt. Long dress-like shirts are a wonderful rebuttal to gender's politics, giving a flowy and more feminine silhouette. On a completely honest level, I've always been self-conscious of my string bean thighs.

BOMBER JACKETS

There's something timeless about a bomber coat. I also love a bomber coat's versatility. It can be worn with a button-up and tie or a tee. My bomber coats tend to be lighter weight and crazy prints are a bonus. My favorite bomber jacket that I own is covered in a floral print you might find on your grandmother's couch, a sweet irony to the bomber jacket's origins as a military flight jacket in the mid-1920s.



Photo by Bryan Whitely

PASTELS

Soft pinks, purples, and blues are my colors of choice when it comes to my wardrobe. It's nice to wear something soft to dichotomize my abrasive personality. In all honesty, my mom told me pastels really complement my skin tone and it kind of stuck.

NAVY CHINOS

Dress them up, dress them down. My chinos are a versatile staple to my wardrobe. Finding the right fit is important and it took me a bit, but now my chinos are a huge part of the weekly rotation.

NAIL POLISH

Another fun f*** you to gender norms, similarly to my wardrobe, I often wear pastel pink, purple, or blue nail polish. Having taken a step back from wearing jewelry this year, my pastel nails are a fun way to accessorize. I always do my nails myself; never been to a nail salon. It's important to me that they look a little sloppy. I am a man, after all.

KIDS' BACKPACKS

My laptop, a pair of sweatpants, and a bottle of mouthwash travel with me everywhere. Why not keep the Kawaii fantasy going with a backpack that looks like a turtle shell?

MY BROTHER'S SNEAKERS

My little brother is one of those people who likes to keep his shoes "crispy." You know the type: the guys who take a toothbrush to their sneakers and will alter their lifestyle to make sure the new kicks stay so fresh and so clean. Meanwhile, I sit idly by waiting for these shoes to expire, swooping in to take them for my own when he deems them too dirty to wear out. With an abundance of free Adidas, Nike, and Jordan, needless to say, beat up shoes have become my thing. ■

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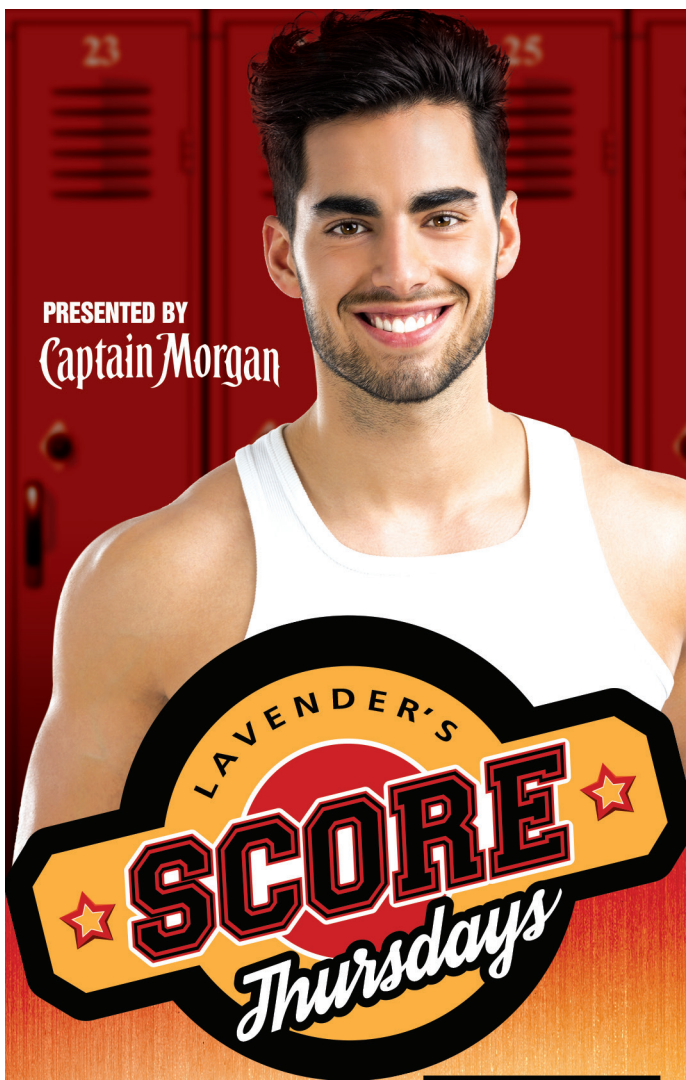
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